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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the educational situation of minority and poor students within the nation's K-12 and higher educational system. It stresses that poor and minority children are the most underserved in America, that they still attend segregated and under-funded schools, that their drop out rate continues to be high, and that those who do manage to persevere often question the quality of their education. The paper provides data on high school completion rates and college participation rates by race/ethnicity from 1970-1991. It also identifies 15 issues that need to be addressed at the K-12 level (such as school-to-work transition, school safety, and multicultural education), as well as the pre-college and institutionally related factors that influence minority participation in higher education. These include: (1) self doubt and first-generation status, (2) campus climates perceived as racist and/or indifferent to minority concerns; and (3) improving retention rates for minority students. Recommendations for colleges and universities include finding new ways of assessing students; transforming the curriculum; redefining the faculty reward structure; focusing more on recruiting, preparing, and graduating minority teachers; and increasing participation in educational partnerships with schools. The report concludes with a list of state recommendations. (GLR)

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A SYSTEMIC VIEW OF MINORITY STUDENTS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Invited Presentation
To
Southern Education Foundation
Panel on Educational Opportunity and
Postsecondary Desegregation

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Austin, Texas
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THE CRISIS IN THE K-12 SYSTEM

I. THE CONTEXT

- Poor and minority children are the most underserved in America
  - — come from poorest families
  - — enjoy least health care
  - — more likely to be attacked, killed or shot as they walk to school
  - — attend least funded schools
  - — are taught by least prepared teachers
  - — are taught with the lowest level curriculum, the oldest books, and lowest expectations

- Poor and minority youngsters continue to attend segregated and under-funded schools, despite a major case that declared segregated schools unconstitutional
  - — *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*

- Many of these students leave school before they graduate

- Those who persevere often wonder what their education is worth, since they still find themselves unprepared for college or the world of work

II. K-12 ATTAINMENT

- Overall, children at risk have made some considerable gains over the past 25 years. According to Chapter 1 Commission (1993):
  - — Almost all poor and minority children today master rudimentary skills
  - — Since 1972, high school dropout rates for Whites decreased from 12.3 percent to 8.9 percent. Dropout rates for African Americans also declined from 21.3 to 13.6 percent
  - — However, dropout rates for Hispanics increased from 34.3 percent in 1972 to 35.3 percent in 1991 (Aspira, 1993)
  - — Achievement gaps in reading, as measured by NAEP, have declined by nearly half
  - — Largest gain in SAT average score from 1976 to 1993 was for African Americans. Still gaps between Whites and non-Whites remain, with Whites scoring higher on the verbal SAT score than all other groups, and Asians scoring higher on the math score

Notes:

1. The absolute numbers of White high school graduates have declined from 1980 (20,123,000 graduates) to 1991 (16,324,000 graduates).

2. The absolute numbers of African American high school graduates have decreased from 1984 (2,885,000 graduates) to 1991 (2,630,000 graduates).

3. The absolute numbers of Hispanic high school graduates have declined from 1987 (1,597,000 graduates) to 1991 (1,498,000 graduates).

4. Declines in absolute numbers are due to lower graduation rates among men, especially for Hispanics, where the rate for men dropped 6 percentage points to a record low of 47.8 in 1991.

5. In absolute numbers, whites have steadily increased their college enrollment. However, African Americans have lost ground, declining in college enrollment from 894,000 in 1990 to 828,000 in 1991. Hispanics have increased their college participation rates from 435,000 in 1990 to 516,000 in 1991.

HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES AND COLLEGE PARTICIPATION RATES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 1970-1991

Race/Ethnicity	High School Graduates (%) 1970	1991	High School Graduates Ages 18-24 Enrolled in College Rate % 1970	1991
Whites	81.4	81.7	33.2	41.7
Afr. Am.	59.5	75.1	26.0	31.5
Hispanic	51.9(1972)	52.1	25.8(1972)	34.4

Source: Carter, D.J. & Wilson, R. (1992) Minorities in Higher Education, Washington, D.C. American Council on Education.

III. ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED AT K-12 LEVEL

- School restructuring/systemic change—avoid special programs. Focus on making impact on mainstream academic program, not on "pull-out" programs.

  Examples:

  Ford Foundation Urban Partnership Project
  Pew Charitable Trusts Community Corporate Project

- Equitable state funding—narrow gap between wealthy and poor school districts
- Computer-aided learning
- School-to-work transition
- Drug and sex education
- School safety
- Year-round schools/extended school days
- Tracking
- Teacher preparation
- Lack of minority teachers
- Test preparation skills
- Multicultural Education
- Bilingual Education/ESL
- Parental Involvement
- Revitalizing Minority Communities

1989-1990 BACCALAUREATE DEGREE ATTAINMENT

Group	Undergraduate Enrollment	% of Total	B.A.	% of Total
White	9,273.000	77.5	882.996	84.3
Hispanic	725,000	6.1	32,686	3.1
African Am	1,147,000	9.6	61,074	5.8
Asian Am/ Pac Is.	501,000	4.2	39,059	3.7
American Indian/ Al.	95,000	.8	4,338	.4
Non Residents	219,000	1.8	26,777	2.6
Total	11,959,000		1,046,930	

Notes:

1. Minorities are continuing to return to education and the social sciences.
2. Women of color posted larger gains at all four major degree levels
3. Minorities registered smaller growth in engineering
4. Business degrees continued to grow, but at a lower rate than growth in education, social sciences and other categories.

Source: Carter, D.J. & Wilson, R. (1992).

1990 GRADUATE DEGREE ATTAINMENT

Group	Graduate Enrollment	% of Total	M.A.	% of Total	Ph.D	% of Total
White	1,228,00	77.4	251,518	78.1	22,156	61.4
Hispanic	47,000	3.0	7,905	2.5	718	2.0
Amer Ind/Al.	6,000	.4	1,108	.3	96	.3
African Am.	84,000	5.3	15,331	4.8	897	2.5
Asian/Pac Is.	53,000	3.3	10,646	3.3	640	1.8
Non Residents	167,000	10.5	35,484	11.0	9,769	27.0
Total	1,586,000		321,992		34,276	

Source: Carter, D.J. & Wilson, R. (1992).

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PARTICIPATION OF MINORITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I. PRE-COLLEGE FACTORS

- Self-doubt
- First-generation status, creating:
  - Distrust of institutional infrastructures
  - Fear of failure
  - Fear about asking questions
  - Fear about being perceived as "stupid" or "lazy"
  - Cultural separation
  - Doubts about being "college material"
  - Trauma associated with making the transition to college
  - Intimidated by system
- Poor academic preparation (due in large part to tracking and attending under-funded schools), creating:
  - Under-developed cognitive skills
  - Poor academic preparation in reading, writing, oratory and study skills
  - Poorly developed test-taking skills
- Lack of clarity about academic goals, creating tentative commitment to educational goals

- Cultural barriers
  - — Latino women/men
  - — Fear of not returning home
  - — Family codes of loyalty and unity
  - — Reluctance to leave home town
- Financial situation—low SES status
- In- and out-of-class invalidating situations
  - — Some told they could only go so far
  - — Some live in communities where college-going is not stressed
  - — Some have never made an "A" in their academic lives
- Peer pressure—"acting white," breaking loyalty to peer group that may not be planning to attend college

II. INSTITUTION-RELATED FACTORS

- Institutions not set up to educate or accommodate for diversity, creating an invalidating environment for students who do not "fit the mold"
  - — Majority of college faculty and administrators are White
  - — College curriculum tends to be Euro-centered
  - — Learning tends to be passive and fiercely competitive
  - — Faculty tend to be detached from students
  - — Students forced to conform to traditional teaching and learning models
  - — Some faculty hold belief systems that perpetuate negative stereotypes of minority students
  - — Theories that have guided thinking about student development may not be appropriate for many minority students, i.e., "involvement theory"
- Campus climate often perceived as racist and/or indifferent to minority student needs and concerns
- Students sometimes channeled into vocational-technical and/or remedial tracks especially in community colleges, exacerbating low transfer rates to four-year colleges
  - — Remedial tracks resemble K-12 tracks

- Transfer shock, i.e., drop in GPA and anxiety created from having to learn new system when transferring from a two- to a four-year institution

- Poor relationships among high schools, community colleges and four-year institutions, creating an incoherent, fragmented system of education that becomes difficult to navigate

- Poor counseling and advisement—crude method of making recommendations

- College costs

SOURCES: Rendon L. & Jalomo, R. (1993); Rendon, L. & Valadez, (1992); Terenzini, P. and others (1993); Rendon, L., Jalomo, R. and Garcia, K. (1993); Rendón, L. and Hope, R. (In Press); Nora (1993)

KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- A de facto segregated school and college system does exist
  - — Segregated inner city schools
  - — Minorities clustered in community colleges, HBCU's and Hispanic serving institutions

- Key issue: Does segregation increase or decrease access, defined as admission to college and graduation from college? Is segregation the key problem or are there other factors to consider that affect access, i.e., cost, admissions standards, high school preparation, lack of institutional responsiveness to minority student concerns, etc.? Consider:
  - — Predominantly white institutions have a long way to go before they educate for diversity
  - — Community colleges may be the glass ceiling for many minorities wishing to earn baccalaureates
  - — Need to study retention rates and social attainment in 2- and 4-year minority serving institutions

- Key issue: How do we improve the public school system, particularly inner city schools so that more at risk students graduate from high school prepared to enter college and believing that they can be successful in college and or in the work force?

- Key issue: How do we get all two- and four-year colleges to have high retention rates, even when having flexible admissions standards?

HIGHER EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Determine new ways of assessing students that go beyond using a single standardized test score to determine college admission

- Transform the Curriculum

  — Make it more inclusive
  — Add multicultural/feminist perspectives
  — Communicate importance of multicultural learning

- Reconceptualize teaching and learning as well as faculty/student relationships

  — Collaborative/cooperative learning
  — Connected teaching
  — Mentoring
  — Validating students and assisting them to get involved in college

- Redefine faculty reward structure
  In addition to traditional rewards for scholarship, teaching and service, emphasize:

  — Extraordinary success working with at-risk students
  — Community service and field work
  — Affirmative action efforts
  — Efforts to transform the curriculum
  — Efforts to build positive campus climate

- Major goal of Colleges of Education should be to recruit, prepare and graduate minority teachers, especially in science and mathematics
- Participate in educational partnerships with schools, 2-year colleges, CBO's, human service agencies. Focus on systemic change; creating coordinated system of education.
- Re-conceptualize community colleges to have two main functions - transfer to senior institutions and transition to world of work
  - — Emphasize transfer
  - — Emphasize transition to work
  - — Partnerships with schools
  - — Partnerships with community, business and industry to prepare students for direct transfer of skills to work force
  - — Make two-year institutions starting point for preparation to graduate/professional schools
- Identify indicators of performance
  - — For students
  - — For colleges
- Strengthen relationships between minority and majority institutions
  - — Research
  - — Faculty development

STATE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sponsor a Governor's Summit on The Education of Underrepresented At-Risk Students

- Take leadership on addressing systemic issues:

  — Transfer from 2- to 4- year colleges
  — Coordination of K-12 system and higher education
  — School-to-work transition
  — Set institution and student performance criteria, i.e., what are the criteria for "world-class" institutions/students?
  — Create and sustain hospitable campus cultures

- Pilot test three-year degree

- Provide financial aid packages, particularly for low income students and for transfer students

- Provide incentives to institutions that implement efforts to improve the recruitment, retention and graduation of culturally diverse student populations